

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for producing spunbond nonwoven fabric, comprising the steps of:

separately melting two or more polypropylene polymer components, at least one component including reclaimed polypropylene recovered from previously spun polypropylene fiber or webs comprised of previously spun polypropylene fiber, and wherein at least one component comprises virgin polymer that has not been subjected to at least two heat histories in which the polymer has been melted and resolidified;

separately directing the two or more molten polypropylene polymer components through a distribution plate configured so that the separate molten polymer components combine at a multiplicity of spinnerette orifices to form bicomponent filaments containing the two or more polymer components, the polymer components being arranged in a sheath-core cross-sectional configuration, with the polymer component containing reclaimed polypropylene being present in the core, and the reclaimed polypropylene being in an amount up to 100% by weight, and with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% by weight or greater;

extruding the multicomponent filaments from the spinnerette orifices into a quench chamber;

directing quench air from a first independently controllable blower into the quench chamber and into contact with the filaments to cool and solidify the filaments;

directing the filaments and the quench air into and through a filament attenuator and pneumatically attenuating and stretching the filaments;

directing the filaments from the attenuator into and through a filament depositing unit;

depositing the filaments from the depositing unit randomly upon a moving continuous air-permeable belt to form a nonwoven web of substantially continuous filaments;

applying suction from a second independently controllable blower beneath the air-permeable belt so as to draw air through the depositing unit and through the air-permeable belt; and

directing the web through a bonder and bonding the filaments to convert the web into a coherent nonwoven fabric.

2 – 3 (Cancelled)

4. (Previously Presented) The process according to Claim 1, wherein the polymer component forming the core is formed entirely of said reclaimed polypropylene.

5. (Original) The process according to Claim 4, wherein the sheath is formed entirely of virgin polypropylene.

6. (Original) The process according to Claim 4, wherein the sheath is formed of a blend of virgin polypropylene and reclaimed polypropylene recovered from previously spun polypropylene fiber or webs comprised of previously spun polypropylene fiber.

7. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a spunbond nonwoven fabric, comprising the steps of:

separately melting a first polymer component comprising virgin polypropylene and a second polymer component comprising reclaimed polypropylene recovered from previously spun polypropylene fiber or webs comprised of previously spun polypropylene fiber, and wherein at least one component comprises virgin polymer that has not been subjected to at least two heat histories in which the polymer has been melted and resolidified;

separately directing the first and second molten polymer components through a distribution plate configured so that the separate molten polymer components combine at a multiplicity of spinnerette orifices to form bicomponent filaments containing a core of the second polymer component and a surrounding sheath of the first polymer component, with the core containing reclaimed polypropylene in an amount up to 100% by weight, and with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% or greater;

extruding the bicomponent filaments from the spinnerette orifices into a quench chamber;

directing quench air from a first independently controllable blower into the quench chamber and into contact with the filaments to cool and solidify the filaments;

directing the filaments and the quench air into and through a filament attenuator and pneumatically attenuating and stretching the filaments;

directing the filaments from the attenuator into and through a filament depositing unit;

depositing the filaments from the depositing unit randomly upon a moving continuous air-permeable belt to form a nonwoven web of substantially continuous filaments;

applying suction from a second independently controllable blower beneath the air-permeable belt so as to draw air through the depositing unit and through the air-permeable belt; and

directing the web through a bonder and bonding the filaments to convert the web into a coherent nonwoven fabric.

8. (Original) A process according to Claim 7, wherein the second polymer component has a melt flow rate at least 5 units greater than that of the first polymer component.

9. (Original) A process according to Claim 7, wherein the core is formed entirely of said reclaimed polypropylene.

10. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a spunbond nonwoven fabric, comprising the steps of:

reclaiming polypropylene from previously spun polypropylene fiber or webs comprised of previously spun polypropylene fiber to produce a second polymer component that has been subjected to at least two heat histories in which the polymer has been melted and resolidified;

separately melting a first polymer component comprising virgin polypropylene and [[a]] the second polymer component comprising the reclaimed polypropylene;

separately directing the first and second molten polymer components through a distribution system configured so that the separate molten polymer components combine at a multiplicity of spinnerette orifices to form bicomponent filaments containing a core of the second polymer component and a surrounding sheath of the first polymer component, with the core containing reclaimed polypropylene in an amount up to 100% by weight, and with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% by weight or greater;

extruding the bicomponent filaments from the spinnerette orifices into a quench chamber;

directing quench air into the quench chamber and into contact with the filaments to cool and solidify the filaments;

directing the filaments and the quench air into and through a filament attenuator and pneumatically attenuating and stretching the filaments;

directing the filaments from the attenuator into and through a filament depositing unit;

depositing the filaments from the depositing unit randomly upon a moving continuous air-permeable belt to form a nonwoven web of substantially continuous filaments; and

directing the web through a bonder and bonding the filaments to convert the web into a coherent nonwoven fabric.

11 - 28 (Cancelled)

29. (Currently Amended) A process for producing spunbond nonwoven fabric, comprising the steps of:

separately melting a first polymer component comprising virgin polypropylene and a second polymer component comprising reclaimed polypropylene recovered from previously spun polypropylene fiber or webs comprised of previously spun

polypropylene fiber, wherein the second polymer component has been previously been subjected to at least two heat histories in which the polymer has been melted and resolidified;

separately directing the first and second molten polymer components to a spin beam assembly equipped with spin packs assembled from a series of plates sandwiched together, including a top plate having inlet ports for receiving the first and second molten polymer components, a metering plate having flow distribution apertures formed therein arranged for distributing the separate first and second molten polymer components, a spinnerette plate having a multiplicity of spinnerette orifices, and upstream from the spinnerette plate, a distribution plate which forms channels configured so that the separate molten polymer components combine at said spinnerette orifices to form bicomponent filaments containing the first and second polymer components, the polymer components being arranged in a sheath-core cross-sectional configuration, with the polymer component containing reclaimed polypropylene being present in the core, and the reclaimed polypropylene being in an amount up to 100% by weight, and with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% by weight or greater;

extruding the multicomponent filaments from the spinnerette orifices into a quench chamber;

directing quench air from a first independently controllable blower into the quench chamber and into contact with the filaments to cool and solidify the filaments;

directing the filaments and the quench air into and through a filament attenuator and pneumatically attenuating and stretching the filaments;

directing the filaments from the attenuator into and through a filament depositing unit;

depositing the filaments from the depositing unit randomly upon a moving continuous air-permeable belt to form a nonwoven web of substantially continuous filaments;

applying suction from a second independently controllable blower beneath the air-permeable belt so as to draw air through the depositing unit and through the air-permeable belt; and

directing the web through a bonder and bonding the filaments to convert the web into a coherent nonwoven fabric.

30. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a spunbond nonwoven fabric, comprising the steps of:

reclaiming polypropylene from previously spun polypropylene fiber or webs comprised of previously spun polypropylene fiber to produce a second polymer component that has been subjected to at least two heat histories in which the polymer has been melted and resolidified;

separately melting a first polymer component comprising virgin polypropylene and [[a]] the second polymer component comprising the reclaimed polypropylene;

separately directing the first and second molten polymer components to a spin beam assembly equipped with spin packs assembled from a series of plates sandwiched together including a spinnerette plate having a multiplicity of spinnerette orifices having a density of at least 3000 orifices per meter of length of the spin beam, and upstream from the spinnerette plate, a thin etched distribution plate which forms channels configured so that the separate molten polymer components combine at said spinnerette orifices to form bicomponent filaments containing a core of the second polymer component and a surrounding sheath of the first polymer component, with the core containing reclaimed polypropylene in an amount up to 100% by weight, and with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% by weight or greater;

extruding the bicomponent filaments from the spinnerette orifices into a quench chamber;

directing quench air into the quench chamber and into contact with the filaments to cool and solidify the filaments;

directing the filaments and the quench air into and through a filament attenuator and pneumatically attenuating and stretching the filaments;

directing the filaments from the attenuator into and through a filament depositing unit;

depositing the filaments from the depositing unit randomly upon a moving continuous air-permeable belt to form a nonwoven web of substantially continuous filaments; and

directing the web through a bonder and bonding the filaments to convert the web into a coherent nonwoven fabric.